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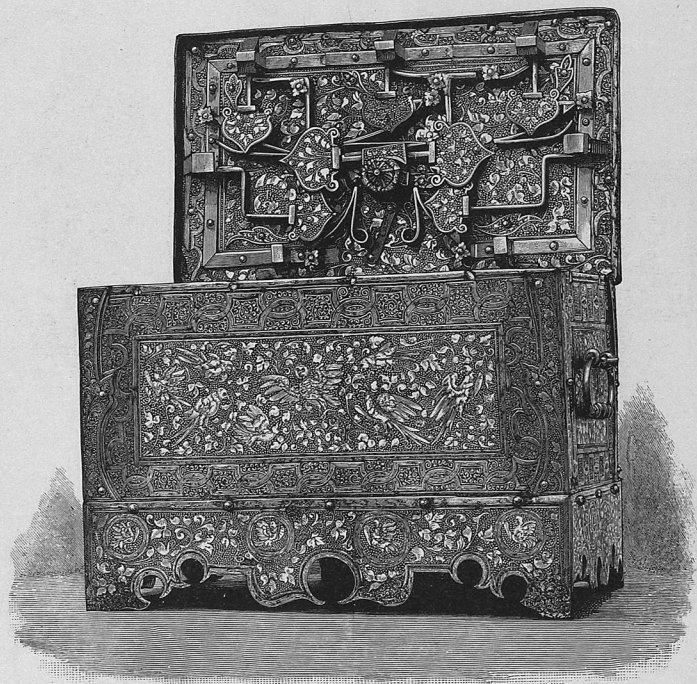
THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

DECORATIVE IRON-WORK.



IRON-WORK for domestic use in the internal arrangements, and in a measure as part of the furniture, or at least the fittings of the houses of the period included within the dates from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, presents many valuable and interesting features alike to the artist as to the archæologist. No doubt many of the objects then in everyday use, and almost necessary to the comfort of the class of society in which the best examples were to be found, have been superseded by articles of a more convenient construction, made of materials more suitable to their use. Jewel-caskets and iron-chests, for example, may be quoted as not at all likely to have any revival in these days. Something equally—positively even more—secure from surreptitious investigation has taken the place of the cumbrous objects belonging to the period above mentioned; and whilst the art displayed in the modern decoration of such objects may be anything but satisfactory, yet convenience has its claims to attention, and in the multiplicity of wants in an age like our own, economy of time, and consequently of cost, becomes a compulsory matter. Hence we dispense with the elaborate decoration of a deed or plate chest, and simple security is all that we care to think of in connection with a repository for our valuables.

the escutcheon which surrounds it in the centre of the top—this cover being formed of a mask in *repoussé*—an ornament starts which forms a rosette. The scrolled details of this ornament runs into the four panels constituting the central compartments, two panels at each end of the lid completing the design. The border-band of each is decorated with scroll work and rosettes in bold relief; and studs, also in high relief, complete the details of the ornamentation—the effect being rich and singularly appropriate. The sides and ends are also decorated and panelled, the panel bands being encised and studded. Boldly designed forged handles complete the two ends. The front is of the same character, while two ornamental clasps in chiselled iron-work form an excellent padlock staple. Both angles of the front are decorated with forged spirals fixed as columns, and rising from brackets resting on the front feet. The body of the coffer is supported on a stand admirably designed and executed; it is composed of four feet with chiselled iron scrolls in forged work issuing from the angles formed by each foot, which at once strengthen the support and add to the decorative effect of the work. The lock is, as usual in these coffers, inside the lid, and covers the whole space except the margin corresponding to the rim round the inside of the upper edges of the chest. This margin is decorated with a foliated tooth-like ornament, the lock itself projecting from it. The design of the lock-plate is executed in perforated sheet-iron, polished, and is divided into two panels, with a boss in the centre corresponding to the key-hole. In one panel is a double-headed eagle with an imperial crown, surrounded by a bold foliated ornament. The breast of the eagle



NUREMBERG CHEST.

The iron coffer numbered 4,255-66 in the South Kensington Museum is a notable example of this class of decorative wrought iron. It is Nuremberg work of the early part of the eighteenth century, and illustrates the "safes of the period." It shows how these repositories for valuables of all kinds were regarded as essentially a portion of the furniture of a well-garnished house, and that they were made, not to put in corners or out-of-the-way places, but to stand as ornaments, as well as objects of use, in prominent positions; the locks, bolts and bars with which they were furnished bring a sufficient justification for regarding them as safe from prying curiosity or the arts of the thief in relation to their contents. Such objects were thought worthy of the best ability of the artist smiths of the centuries we have already indicated.

This example of which we give an illustration on this page, is decorated on the top with *appliqué* scroll-work in *repoussé*, admirably designed and executed. These scrolls are adapted to the shape of the panels formed by the flat bands of iron which are themselves incised with scroll ornaments, the bands giving strength to the top of the coffer, and thus forming a detail in the decoration. From the cover to the key-hole, or rather on

bears a shield charged with two keys crossed and a hammer—a device of the maker, engraved on the outer rim in German is "This lock has been made by Benedict Hild, locksmith." In the other panel a similar ornament surrounds the facade of a palace. The details of these ornaments, as also of the eagle and palace, are admirably etched. The date is quoted inside, 1716. The lock has eighteen bolts, which shoot under the inside rim already mentioned. The coffers of the sixteenth, seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth centuries differed considerably in various countries and localities, alike in construction and decoration. In Germany, Flanders, and sometimes in England, coffers of comparatively plain construction, being simply an iron chest body, bound round by broad bands of iron riveted through the construction plates, were in common use. Not unfrequently they were painted and gilt, the bands being of one color and the panels formed by these bands being another; the rivets were gilt and the edges of the bands "picked out" either in gold or some darker color than that of the panels of the bands themselves. Sometimes the panels were filled with painted devices, heraldic or symbolical, and at other times a series of heads formed the decoration. Occasionally a whole subject, historical or religious,

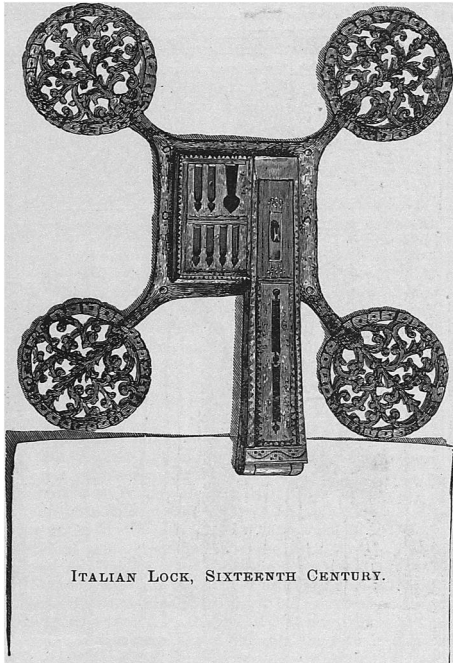
THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER

was represented, and intercepted only by the bands passing over it; for, as already stated, these chests were important pieces of furniture in well-appointed houses, and were rendered as decorative as possible, the finest being invariably those which, like our illustrative example, were, the work of artist-smiths, and iron-work alike in construction and ornamentation.

As another example of this class, the casket figured on page 7 (No. 396-54) of sixteenth century German work, is of great interest. It is formed of plates of metal riveted together at the angles, these angles being covered with decorated framing plates, cut to an ornamental profile, which unite with broader plates of a similar character running round the base of the casket, and form an ornamental foot or rest for the whole. The surface decorations consist of an elaborate series of floriated designs with birds introduced in the central portion, the borders consisting of cartouches. The top is decorated in a similar manner, the whole having been bitten into the surface with a strong acid in the manner of etching, suggesting a damascened effect, but without the insertion of gold and silver. The angle plates and the foot plates are riveted upon the panels, and the rivets are so distributed as to aid the ornamental effect as studs. The lock is in the outside of the top, covering the whole surface, the key-hole being in the middle. The details of this lock are very decorative, being cut into admirably designed plates covering the angles of the bolt springs. There are seven bolts, all being shot simultaneously by the turn of the key, and they act as claw bolts under the inside projecting rim of the interior, and make the casket and its contents very secure. As an example of workmanship this specimen is worthy of special examination, whilst the

workers in iron, to the full as much as the elaborate carvings in wood and stone exercised the workers in those materials.

The extent to which certain fixed articles of furniture were at once strengthened and decorated by forged iron-work of a highly artistic character was formerly so great that it is difficult in these days of colored woods and French polish to understand how the amount of work was done; but in the period of which



ITALIAN LOCK, SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

ornamentation is very suggestive alike as regards the art displayed in the design, and the method by which the decorative effect is realized.

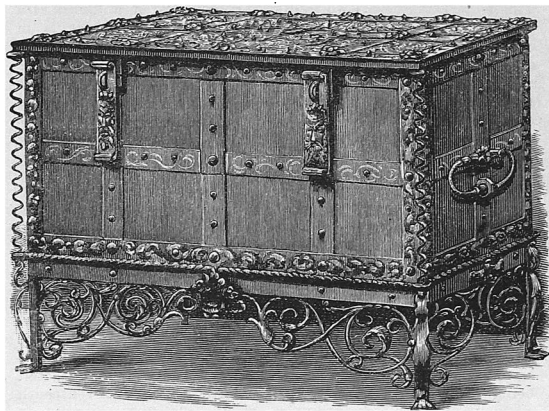
Many jewel caskets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were elaborate examples of geometric design, in which great ingenuity and skill were shown by those who designed and constructed them. Following the system by which the panelling, window tracery, and tabernacle work of the best period of decorated Gothic were constructed, their plates of metal were perforated by drilling, cutting and filling into tracery so adapted that when a series of plates were laid over each other they formed complete Gothic panels producing a charming effect of light and shade. These perforated plates drilled at proper points in the design—a plain plate as the back being drilled to correspond were riveted together, and formed the sides and top of the casket. The rivet-heads were chiselled into decorative forms, and hased as rosettes in a variety of ways.

Nothing in the way of decorative iron-work could be more simple than the method of construction; and the ingenuity shown in the designs, and the perfect adaption of the series of plates to the completion of the full effect, exercised the skill and tested the knowledge of graphic geometry of the mediæval



FRENCH GIRANDOLE, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

we are treating, the smiths of each century must have been as abundant as persons who in these days bear the name without following the calling. In the cupboard front (published in our August number) we have a German example of about 1550, probably Nuremberg work. It is of oak, overlaid, with polished iron mounts, hinges and latches. It is a singular perfect illustration of the adaption of the metal mounts to the door of a cupboard, or possibly a cabinet fixed in a wall. The design is divided into four spaces by the framed work of the sides and a vertical and horizontal cross-bar, thus forming four doors, each pair having a double fastening working from the vertical bar. The illustration shows the two lower doors only. Highly decorated bolt plates of perforated ornament are fixed upon each



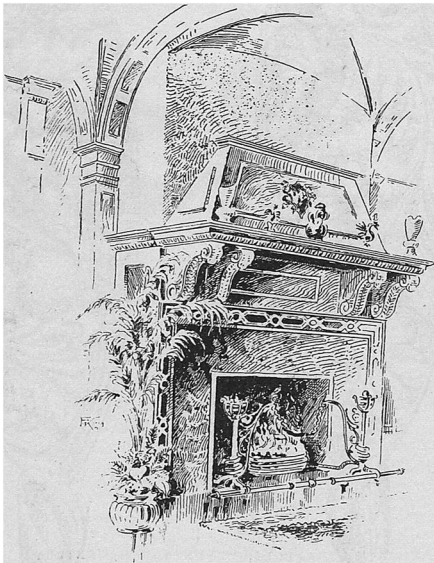
GERMAN COFFER, SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

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door—balancing each other—and the bolts of each pair work in opposite directions upon this cross-bar.

The hinges are so arranged that the mainstay plates are attached to the outside framework, and the hinge proper corresponds with the fit of the door, as the horizontal decoration crosses and secures each door in parallel lines. The building strength of these decorations is very great. Nothing can be more simple in form and detail than these decorative adjuncts, and yet the ornamental effect is practically perfect. The finish of the iron work by polishing contrasts admirably with the dark wood on which the iron work is fixed, but we can conceive that when the whole was new the new oak harmonized with excellent effect with the polished mounts.

The introduction of gilt, brass, or ormolu mounts on furniture in the period and style now known as Louis Quatorze superseded the modest but more legitimate iron mounts of a simpler and less ostentatious age, in which utility, strength and solidity were aimed at as the true basis on which decorative effects were produced. In these constructions we had science



FIRE-PLACE IN FRONT HALL OF E. H. JOHNSON, ESQ., GREENWICH, CONN., (PRESIDENT EDISON ELECTRIC LIGHT CO.)

as a basis, and the ornamentation was invariably designed so as to embellish and enhance the essential construction and form to the eye, and in no sense to conceal, but rather to display the construction. The debased style of ornamentation came into vogue with the fripperies of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. French art ignored all science in construction, and undoubtedly led to the utter neglect of all true design, and the final obliteration of the workman-designer alike in wood and metal work.

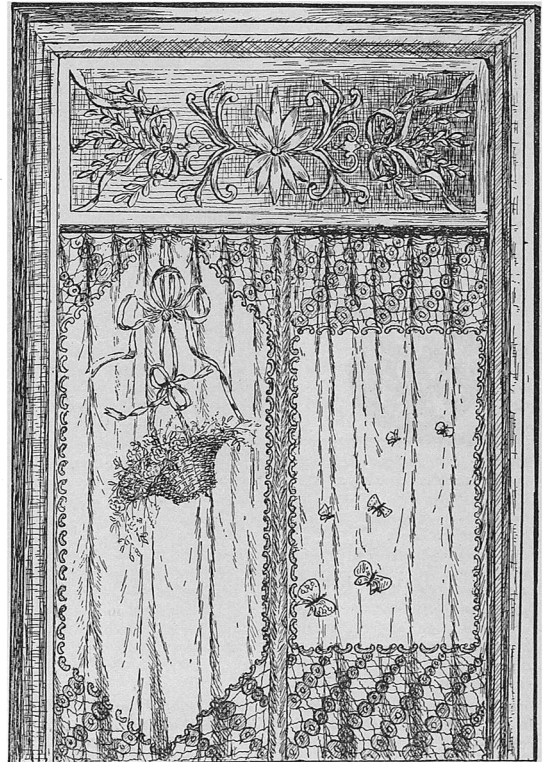
Our next subject scarcely comes within the range of wrought iron work proper, although it is certainly decorated iron work. This is a girandole of two lights. It consists of a figure of a female Triton holding a pair of sconces. The figure is in cast iron, produced after the Italian manner, although French of the seventeenth century, by the method used in bronze casting *a la cire perdue*. The ornaments on which the sconces are fixed, as also the sconces themselves, are of forged iron. The double fish tails or basements to the figure are cast solid with the figure itself. The whole work is admirably executed in its style—that is of bronze work rather than iron. The figure and cast proportions are chiselled and finished with a polish which renders the whole an admirable adjunct to a fireplace, or a mirror, or as a bracket. A companion work has a male Triton as the subject of the figure.

As a matter of *technique* the combination of wrought and cast iron in this work is interesting, but the more legitimate method is to construct the work as a whole of wrought iron and then to add the figures in cast iron in such a position in the design that the riveting or screwing on of details is not necessary. The cast portions then take their places as an adjunct to the wrought iron framework and decoration.

The lock and hasp engraved are of a very different character, being Italian work of the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. These are examples of the elaborate manner in which locks and door-handle plates were decorated during the

latter part of the fifteenth, the whole of the sixteenth and the early part of the seventeenth centuries. The plates of flat forged iron are chiselled in the geometric forms necessary to give effect to the decorations and security to the lock, handle or hasp, of which it is at once the ornament and means of attachment. The plates are perforated by drilling, and chiselling into the chequered or foliated designs. These are assisted in the details by incised work, giving the variations of the foliage, and further decorated by punching up from the back studs at stated intervals, in the manner of *repousse*. The plates are arranged in the form of a St. Andrew's cross, with the locks in the centre, the locks being also decorated with incised panel work.

A PRODUCTION in solid relief ornament gives opportunity for endless variations in arrangement. These detached pieces are of varied forms, providing corner pieces, sections of borders and panels in different form. The elements of a ceiling or other division of a room may be selected from among them, and the construction carried out as desired. Vines are sold by the yard, and circular and octagon ceiling center pieces on another estimate. The material may be obtained in a raw state if preferred, and the decoration in color applied after it is fixed on the wall. The same variety of ornament is mounted on fire screens. This may be made quite decorative combined with upper panels in wood carved in open work, with settings of cut jewels encircling a center of circular form in stained glass.



DESIGN FOR PORTIERE, BY VIRGINIA BRUSH.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TREATMENT.

The room should be in tints of a fresh though soft and subdued tone, the woodwork of a warm, deep cream, the grill of wood carved, and the designs picked out in dull gold in relief. The pole also should be of dull gold and the portiere of a deep creamy basket silk, a little on the buff tone, the bow-knots suspended from the top, and holding the basket, of Louis XIII. blue silks embroidered, the basket in light soft browns, and worked to represent coarse wicker ware. The flowers, nothing but roses, of all the varied soft and dainty hues of nature, adding for strength a few jacquemins, and with the subdued greens in the leaves, could be made to look like a reality instead of a semblance. The applique designs surrounding it should be of plush either in a rich, soft oak or blue of a silver hue, couched with Japanese gold, and the sewings between the applique of the same thread. The butterflies can be copied from natural ones, although not too bright, as the effect of absolute harmony would be spoiled. The backing of the portieres would of course be dependent upon the treatment of the inner tone. The fringe should be very delicate and creamy, with a trifle of gold only, with a tassel tied here and there.